

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Bob Michel**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
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Smith: Where did you meet Gerald Ford?

Michel: Well, that was very interesting, I was just an AA at that time, an Administrative Assistant, to my predecessor Harold Velde who happened to be elected in the same class with Jerry Ford. And it just so happened that that year, the Junior Chamber of Commerce in their selection for the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Year, picked Jerry Ford to be the Politician of the Year. Percy was the Businessman of the Year at that time, and Bud Wilkinson the Coach of the Year. But anyway, we had one of the most active Junior Chamber of Commerce groups in Peoria following World War II, so we got the national banquet and Paul Hoffman was the Speaker.

I was detailed then to meet Jerry at the airport and get him downtown to the hotel. You know how that goes, to shepherd him around to the places he had to be. So that's how I first met what I never would've expected for an eventual president of the United States or minority leader in the Congress. Had I known all those things at that time, I don't know that I'd have been asking Jerry any more questions than I did.

Smith: What was he like? What was your impression of him?

Michel: Oh, of course he was very young and bouncy and full of vim and vigor and he was all enthused by being named the Politician of the Year by the Jaycees, so it was a nice weekend. I guess it was Friday and Saturday or whatever, I kind of forget.

Smith: Now, Harold Velde was in Congress how long?

Michel: Just four terms. He succeeded Everett Dirksen. He was a former FBI agent during the war and he was just so ticked off that nothing ever happened about the Communist conspiracy, so his big bugaboo was rooting out the Commies.

Smith: Really?

Michel: So, that was his one goal and I think that's why he was probably limited to four terms. Then, it was controversial, the Hollywood Ten and Bishop Oxnam and stuff like that.

Smith: Was he involved with the Alger Hiss case?

Michel: Yeah, right.

Smith: Ford came from a somewhat different place. Young veteran coming back from the war who had been an isolationist, and then along with Arthur Vandenberg became an internationalist. How would you describe his politics at that early stage in his career?

Michel: I'd characterize it as typically Midwestern.

Smith: What does that mean?

Michel: Basically in those days, obviously it's changed over a period of time, but in those days, pretty conservative. That was the bastion of the hard Right in a sense, although Jerry was never considered to be one of those. But, Everett Dirksen country out in central Illinois, of course he became the Leader. If I'd characterize my own entry into the Congress, it was, "Well, Bob, you just go down to Washington and cut the cost of government and lower my taxes. We don't want anything. Just get the government off my back." I think pretty much that was Jerry's feeling at that time, too, because the philosophy was you do for yourself whatever you can and the government eventually will maybe supplement the shortcomings.

Smith: Now, clearly fiscally very conservative, yet on what then were social issues, particularly civil rights, was a moderate, moderate to liberal.

Michel: Right.

Smith: How would that sit with people in your district?

Michel: I don't know that he ever ran up against any sort of buzz saw in our caucus that he was too liberal or too moderate, though he succeeded Charlie Halleck

and Charlie was quite conservative and a forceful Leader when he was there. Then, of course, times change just like when Halleck succeeded Joe Martin. Times do change.

Smith: Tell me about that because that's got to be a wrenching experience, whether it's because of age or other factors. I mean, Halleck overthrew Joe Martin.

Michel: That was a learning experience for me. I remember first being elected on my own after four terms with my predecessor and going in to, "Mr. Speaker," - you know he'd been Speaker, twice trading off with Rayburn. And I said, "It might surprise you, but I'm not asking for a seat on Appropriations or Ways and Means, as much as I would like it. Just keep me off the Education and Labor Committee," because, at that time, organized labor was a big force in the political scheme of things, the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, the repeal of Section 14B. And my predecessor had a primary all four times that he ran simply because he was having problems with, in our case, it was the Caterpillar UAW 974. It was a big force, 24,000 members in that one local, so it was a factor. Then, of course, eventually in dealing with Jerry, he'd become Leader, et cetera, et cetera, well, he was quite well aware of what problems I would have to confront in my district to get reelected.

Smith: What led to Joe Martin's ouster?

Michel: Well, you mentioned the fact that he was getting up in years and there was question about that. And he was a bachelor and I remember when I first would see him, he'd always wear a vest and part of his breakfast and lunch was on the vest. He didn't have a wife looking after him, but he was a wonderful old fellow. As a matter of fact, the Republicans in Massachusetts in those days, gosh, that was a Republican state, nothing like it is today. That has completely turned around. But he wasn't nearly the Speaker anymore that I had remembered from watching national conventions and when he and some of the leaders in the party of those times were up there ranting and raving. Well, he obviously was not that kind of fiery Leader anymore. So, I think it was one of those things, an evolutionary thing, younger people coming along. Of course, Charlie Halleck was a real fireball and he wanted to make things move. And, boy, I had pressure put on me by Les Arends because Les was a

neighboring district to mine, a whip longer than any man probably in the history of the country, twenty-five years. He was content to not move up to Leader, but he supported his Leader each time, in this case, Joe Martin over Halleck. But, underneath it all, I could see the membership really wanted a change of leadership and went along with voting for Charlie.

Smith: Let me ask you, because my sense is, in elections like this, ideology matters less than generational factors.

Michel: Right.

Smith: That, in fact, generational factors maybe account for a lot more than most people think. It's almost like an escalator. It's your turn and then it's someone else's turn. At that point, Ford is not in the leadership when you first arrived in Congress. Did you imagine that he was headed for such things?

Michel: Well, first having met him earlier on and so when I'd see him once in awhile, of course, I would address him as "Congressman Ford," "Mr. Ford," et cetera, et cetera. And then I guess one of the things for me, you know, the Chowder & Marching Society was quite a force in our Republican party in those early days, Mel Laird, and Jerry, John Byrnes, and Glenn Davis from Wisconsin and Jackson from California, there was Boggs from Delaware and John Lodge from Connecticut. But it was a group of fellows, returning veterans at that time. As a matter of fact, that's how the whole C & M thing got started - was over a veteran's pension bill and these twelve fellows got together and said, "We're robbing Peter to pay Paul. Who're we kidding here? We're all veterans." And they banded together and decided they're going to vote against it as much as that was an unpopular thing, to vote against a veteran's pension bill and they beat it by one vote. And then they said, "You know, we might be a pretty forceful little group if we'd stick together and pick out these issues and take them on." And so that's how the whole thing got started.

Smith: And Ford was part of that group?

Michel: Right. And Dick Nixon, of course.

Smith: It's interesting, because in those days, he [Ford] used to tell this story – how he was told one day to be outside a committee room at such and such a time. And it turned out it was the old bulls who were responsible for CIA and basically all intelligence oversight. That was a very small group of veteran congressmen, no staff, no notes. They met behind closed doors as long as it took to answer all of their questions. And they brought Ford in as a junior member which tells you something about what they thought about Ford. What were those personal qualities that made him appealing?

Michel: You know, it's really hard to put your finger on it exactly, except that against the whole, Jerry always stood out. He was very likeable and approachable. He had no airs about him whatsoever. He was just out there making friends. He was a popular individual, I think. When I look back on my own climb up the ladder, I thought there's nothing better than emulating Jerry Ford's approach to things because it worked for him very well.

Smith: And presumably, these old bulls had taken the measure and decided among other things, this guy could be trusted with secrets, which was not universally the case in the House.

Michel: No, that's true. He was, of course, another one of those in the service, but an officer, too, and they respected that.

Smith: And then the first NASA oversight committee, he's on that. Then, of course, later on the Warren Commission. At some point before '64, there's some grumbling about the Republican leadership. I don't know that it was aimed at Halleck, but certainly I guess Hoeven of Iowa.

Michel: Yeah, Charlie Hoeven.

Smith: Who was Charlie Hoeven?

Michel: He was from Iowa, basically very conservative, very conservative. You'd have to slot him right over here on the Right. But from that point on, well, H.R. Gross of Iowa would be in there in that group, but he was always right over here on the Right.

Smith: You know, there's a famous story that H.R. Gross, the weekend of President Kennedy's assassination, wanted to know how much the Eternal Flame was going to cost.

Michel: Oh, he was a character, I tell ya.

Smith: Ford wasn't that kind of conservative.

Michel: Oh, of course not. No, that's the other thing. I think people looked at him and said this fellow's basically conservative on the fiscal issues and socially moderate, he was no ideologue, let's put it that way. He was just no ideologue and if we were going to get back into power someday, there's a big middle ground out there where we've got to make points and Jerry seemed to be the fellow that really could very well appeal to that group of people.

Smith: You know, it's interesting, we talked with Leon Parma, who in those days was with Bob Wilson. He told us something quite extraordinary that I've never heard before. In I think it was '58, when Halleck took on Joe Martin – late 50s – they'd actually approached Ford to see if he had any interest in it and he wasn't at that point interested in doing it.

Michel: And '58, of course, was a bad recession year. Boy, I felt it out there because that was the first year I was running for reelection after first being elected in '56 and half my freshman class got flushed down the tube in the recession of '58. So, boy, I learned early on, man, I tell you, when the economy is down and as much union labor as I had at that time, you just had to watch your Ps and Qs.

Smith: That's interesting because one of the things he always used to talk about was Guy Vander Jagt as the example. That, Guy, as he climbed the ladder nationally, lost touch with the district. Ford was someone who really never had to worry about getting reelected, and yet he would go home an astonishingly frequent number of times.

Michel: And that points out that Vander Jagt was so busy as chairman of the congressional campaign committee that he thought that was his forte. And he was good at it, and a good speaker, and a good fundraiser and people all asked

him to come. In the meantime, he was losing some strength at home. So you just can't ignore those folks back home.

Smith: How often would he go home in those days?

Michel: Well, of course, there were several problems. One was the distance and the cost of the airline fare. I drove a number of times and back in those days, Dan Rostenkowski, the Democrat from Chicago, and Phil Crane and Harold Collier and I, we were in a station wagon, we'd leave on a Thursday night and that's before the interstate and we'd drive all night. I'd drop them off in Chicago and I would go 160 miles down to Peoria afterwards and then go back the following Monday night or Tuesday. Boy, I tell you, that wasn't the best way to commute back and forth, but it was limited. The cost and the distance and the fact that it wasn't as easy to do as it is today.

Smith: Presumably, you spent a lot less time raising money.

Michel: Oh, that's true. When people ask me today, that's one of the first things that I'm just flabbergasted at, the amounts of money that are spent. As a matter of fact, people ask me, "Well, what'd you spend on your campaign, Bob?" I'd say, "On my first campaign, \$15,000 to get myself elected to Congress." And I remember the time when we had the first million dollar race, Bob Dornan out in California, I thought, "Gee wiz, what's happening here?" And of course now it's just commonplace. But, really, too much time, that's the problem today, spending time raising money instead of legislating.

Smith: I remember that was one thing President Ford complained about. But he also said that it was much better when staffs were smaller.

Michel: That's another thing. When I first came to Washington then, Ev Dirksen had four people, and he was chairman of a subcommittee on Appropriations, but he had four people working in our congressional office. So, when I came down with Judge Velde to take over from Dirksen, I thought, "Well, who's it going to be?" Three of the four we hired worked for Dirksen because they were the ones who really knew what was going on. But then it kept getting larger and larger and larger. I know Dave Obey who's still in the saddle

today, was one of those instigators way back then, “We need more staff. We need more staff.” Then it just kept growing and growing.

Smith: What happens when you need more staff? Does it mean you need more work?

Michel: Initially, when people were still sending telegrams, when I was first elected, that made a difference. We didn’t have faxes and you didn’t have this instant communication; you had to rely on a letter principally. Telephone calls were too much, too costly. Even the telegrams, only the rich people would send you a telegram. So it was a different line of communication, but you really tended to your mail. I could tell, for example, on a Monday or Tuesday whether the Women’s Christian Temperance Union had met last Thursday night on some thing because then the following Tuesday or so, in come these pink and blue letters telling me to vote against whatever had rankled them. But it was different communicating in those days, simpler, I guess in a sense. But then everything has evolved since that time to the degree that you got so much going in the way of communication just to answer the emails and the faxes. That’s how it grew, I guess.

Smith: Tell me about Ford’s relationship with Ev Dirksen.

Michel: Well, of course, I really considered Ev to be my mentor because he represented the district I had represented before Judge Velde. Same number of counties, six counties. And he was in the House for sixteen years and Jerry respected that and the gift of gab that Senator Dirksen had. Jerry really enjoyed working with him. Basically conservative, but also at critical times to buck Colonel McCormick’s *Chicago Tribune*, he had his view of the world out there on foreign affairs because he made a lot of trips abroad. His modus operandi and philosophy, I think, Jerry felt that suited him very well. And I think he probably took a note from him and thought, “Look, he’s the Leader. He’s basically conservative, but yet on social issues, he knew where to go.”

Smith: Dirksen was a great showman and Dirksen generated a lot of copy and some people resented that. Ford didn’t seem to have resented that at all, as if, he could wait his time. Dirksen himself, someone asked about their relationship



and he said, "Congressman Ford is the sword and I am the oil can." But as far as you could see they got along very well?

Michel: Oh sure.

Smith: Even though Dirksen had worked with Halleck before, that didn't come between them.

Michel: No.

Smith: First of all, Ford runs against Hoeven in '62. Did you support Ford?

Michel: Yeah. I was generally in that group. Mel Laird, of course.

Smith: Tell me about those Young Turks, because you had Mel Laird, you had Charlie Goodell, you had John Lindsay. It was a different party.

Michel: Oh, yeah, we were from all parts of the country, too.

Smith: You really didn't have a Southern party at that point.

Michel: No.

Smith: But really the Midwest was sort of the center of gravity.

Michel: Yeah.

Smith: But you had a liberal wing in the Northeast.

Michel: By all means, by all means. And they had to be dealt with from time to time even after all those years that intervened by the time I became Leader, I could pretty well say there was six of them I really had a problem with.

Smith: From the Northeast?

Michel: Yeah. And I'd have to, on close votes even right up to when Reagan became President and I was his Leader for his tax program and economic plan and I had only 192 members on my side. I had to get every one of those solid, plus 26 or -7 or -8 on the other side. So that was my chore, getting enough from the other side to join us so we could vote on a number of key votes when

Reagan took over. Just by three and four votes, we won the issues. That was exhilarating.

Smith: '64, of course, was the Goldwater debacle. Were you at the convention?

Michel: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Do you remember the night they almost booed Rockefeller out of the hall?

Michel: Oh, yeah. Geez.

Smith: What was that like?

Michel: Well, some of these things then, as young as I was, were a new experience for me. I was kind of betwixt and between. I think I traveled in 38 states for Barry Goldwater that year and then nearly lost my own seat to a hand truck driver, a Caterpillar. And so that was a lesson, I tell you, too.

Smith: So, you were a Goldwater supporter?

Michel: Yeah, right. Sure. He had a lot of the really young Republicans and he could fire them up pretty well, you know. But with me, it wasn't a question of loving him and hating the other, it's just that I was enthused over Barry's approach and thought, "Well, we'll do whatever we can for him."

Smith: In between, of course, there had come the Kennedy assassination and the Warren Commission. Did it surprise you that President Johnson would ask this relatively unknown Republican congressman from Michigan to be on the Warren Commission?

Michel: Jerry had already gained a reputation for being a real solid individual thinker, as I said, again, no ideologue, but one who had really a great respect for the institution, one who could make it work. So I guess, no, we wouldn't be surprised at that.

Smith: Yet it sort of flies in the face of the popular image, you know, some of the things that Johnson said about Ford over the years. Pretty clearly, if he'd believed those things, he never would have asked Ford to be on the Warren Commission.

Michel: Yeah.

Smith: Did he talk to you at all about his work on the Commission?

Michel: Not much. At that time, at C & M, you know, we'd have some of the informal back and forth. "Jerry, what's it like?" Because we kind of had a code of secrecy in the group and whatever we discuss in this group doesn't go any further, otherwise we're going to lose the importance of our group. So Jerry was always forthcoming to us to the degree that we were well enough informed to be supportive of what he was doing.

Smith: Did you accept the basic conclusions of the Warren Commission?

Michel: Mhmm.

Smith: That basically they found no evidence of a conspiracy?

Michel: Right.

Smith: After the '64 election was there immediately a desire among House Republicans for change?

Michel: Well, pretty much so, because we'd been down and then to think we took such a terrible pasting in '64, the number of seats that we lost again. And, "Geez, here we are really mired down. Where are we going to go?" And, of course, Charlie realized the brunt of that.

Smith: A number of people also said he had a bit of a drinking problem.

Michel: Oh, yes, there's no question about that.

Smith: Was that more prevalent in those days?

Michel: I think so. Though, shucks, when I was Ev Dirksen's congressman, one of my good fortunes was to go over late in the afternoon to see the Senator and that was the time he used to have the folks, that's how I met Lyndon Johnson, way back when, Flood Byrd was there and all the rest. But, of course, we were from the Peoria area with distilleries, Hiram Walker century(?) and whatnot, and I was kind of the old bartender back there in the back room for

the Senator himself. "Hey, Bob, I think I'll have about three fingers and don't mix it with anything."

Smith: Do you think it was covered up a little bit more in those days than it is now?

Michel: Yeah, probably. Right. And as a matter of fact my predecessor had a serious problem with it, too. I learned from that. That was too bad, but that was the case.

Smith: When you run a race like that for a leadership post, the top post among Republicans, how do you put a campaign together? How do you wage that campaign? What's your constituency? What do you promise? What do you deliver?

When Jerry Ford decided to run against Halleck, how do you campaign?

Michel: That's a ticklish thing to do and you've got to have a good sense up here of where the membership is. He just had to because he couldn't make the charge without being successful or he'd be in deep doo-doo. When you stop and think how you put your finger on it, it was just by word of mouth and a little bit here and there and groups, not big groups, just two people talking to one another and then two other people talking to one another.

Smith: And Don Rumsfeld was instrumental in that race.

Michel: Right.

Smith: Bob Dole.

Michel: And Bob Griffin from Michigan. Of course, in that group, we had Chuck Chamberlain and Bob Griffin and McIntyre and, who'd I leave out? But they were elected in my class, four from Michigan that one year.

Smith: Do you think it was mostly generational, again?

Michel: Obviously, now that I look back on it, it had to be part of that because this was really a younger group of guys. Mel Laird was very active, always, with Jerry. Of course, I remember when he was first making the rounds to select Jerry as the vice president.

Smith: Well, there is some speculation that in fact Mel's name was considered in '64 along with Ford's as a prospective candidate against Halleck.

Michel: Right.

Smith: I assume not everyone tells you the truth when you ask for your vote.

Michel: Well, that was a tough one for me. Actually, Charlie took a liking to me. I was president of my class. He took me out to Burning Tree with Les Arends the first time. As a freshman, he had me come back to his district to give the Lincoln Day speech. And I really had those loyalties there, boy, I tell you. Of course, maybe Charlie knew I was Ev Dirksen's congressman. That was a special bond there, so it was a tough one for me when the time really came. Of course, Les Arends really leaned hard on me. I was one of the younger guys then and it was very important that they split up that group.

Smith: How could Les Arends lean on you? What pressure, for lack of a better word?

Michel: Well, there was no real threats other than, "Bob, did you vote?" Talk in those terms. Man, I had a tough time saying - I'm trying to think what kind of response I made, I'm sure it was kind of fuzzy - I said, "Well, I love Charlie," but I never went so far as to say, "I'm definitely voting for Charlie." I just left it hanging out there.

Smith: Do you think Halleck was surprised by the result?

Michel: I suppose so. He was hurt and then what really was bad of all things when he was defeated, there was no committee for him. He went back to become, it was, on the House Administration Committee. Incidentally, that was one of the things when I became Leader, I corrected. If I should be defeated for Leader or something, I can still go back to my committee, which was Appropriations, and could've been chairman of the doggone committee. But I just thought that was devastating. I thought that was unfair and, for one who had given so much, yes he lost that election, but geez, he's still a respected elder. That hurt Charlie.

Smith: Did he ever get over it?

- Michel: I don't know if he ever did or not, but in our relationship after that, nothing ever changed.
- Smith: And that brings a larger question, because there were clearly people around Halleck that were loyal to him, how did they deal with the new leadership?
- Michel: Well, I guess it just kind of automatically fell in place. More and more of them realized, "Geez, we've had a devastating year," '64 was, "and we just got to do something here to get out of this mold and break out." So, the climate was right for making the move.
- Smith: And presumably Ford had the kind of temperament and personality that made it easy for them.
- Michel: Sure. He was conservative enough, too, because I always said, "You can't be elected Leader unless you're basically conservative on the key issues of the day."
- Smith: So now, you have a new Leader, and you're faced with this need to come up with an alternative to the Great Society. Tell me about that, because today, you don't even hear the phrase 'the loyal opposition.'
- Michel: No.
- Smith: You were the loyal opposition.
- Michel: Yeah.
- Smith: What did that mean?
- Michel: That meant that "Gee-whiz, we're so outnumbered that there's never anything on the floor, doggone it, that we like. We're just against everything and we should have what we called a 'constructive Republican alternative proposal.'" That acronym there, we got criticized a lot for that. And Charlie Goodell, of course, from New York, was very helpful in bringing along constructive Republican alternative proposals and then it got to be kind of a natural thing for us. We really got to have, particularly on a Motion to Recommit, what is it? Well, it's a sensible proposal as an alternative to the opposition with all its votes. And, who knows, maybe a time or two we'll win if we don't get too

aggressive or take too big a bite. And then sometimes the question then arose, you just want to make a political statement or do you really want to win something? And we'd have that argument sometimes because "Well, let's get what we can today. Who knows? There'll be another tomorrow."

Smith: What was the difference between how a Sam Rayburn ran the House and a John McCormick? Was there a difference?

Michel: Well, of course, Rayburn was the first Speaker under which I served. I looked up to him like he was God Almighty as the Speaker. But, you know, in spite of that, he, you could see, was really dedicated to the House. He would sit in the chair during those monotonous special order things. Man, today, you'd never have any of the leadership sitting in the chair for the special order things. But he did. When we had the Gwin Party(?), for example, Rayburn came and he really had one heck of a good time and the guys were throwing napkins and bread and everything around the dining room like rockets and Rayburn would laugh about it.

Now, the big difference there between he and John McCormick is that John McCormick always had dinner with his wife. That was what he was known for; he didn't go to these things. But I had the good fortune of having him as my first subcommittee chairman and the ranking member was big Bud Brown from Ohio. McCormick and Brown were the leaders of my first subcommittee on government operations. I had the wonderful opportunity to learn from both of those Leaders. And Sam Rayburn, he knew the members.

Smith: Were they fair to Republicans?

Michel: Oh, yeah, I think both of them, I would say. Absolutely. They were Speaker of the whole House. They respected the fact that the minority had something to say. I'm trying to think of our Parliamentarian. Lou Deschler was the Parliamentarian at the time and there were some of those questions that would come up every once in awhile and I always thought their rulings were quite fair.

- Smith: Let me ask you, on civil rights, you had the Civil Rights Bill of '64 and then the Voter Rights Act of '65. Were there any significant divisions within the Republican caucus? You were just beginning to get some summoned—
- Michel: Well, obviously then, the real strong proponent was for example you mentioned John Lindsay earlier. And even after all that period of time, the years, for me, it really didn't dawn on me how important an issue that is for them, as distinguished from what little attention was given to that by my constituents, many of whom could care less. And it was tough for that to finally get through my noggin, that, "Gee, that is an important issue. And, while the people back home don't talk about it, in other sections of the country, that's a very important issue." That you had to wake up to the fact and get with it.
- Smith: Yeah. Now, Ford voted for both bills and I suspect a majority of Republicans. In fact, famously in the Senate was Republican votes that passed the Civil Rights bill because you had the southern Democrats who were all against it.
- Michel: That's the big thing Everett Dirksen will be noted for. Had it not been for him at that time, it wouldn't have happened.
- Smith: It's interesting, because when you go back to the *Ev and Jerry Show*, in some of the interviews we've had there was a sense among some of the younger members, there was a feeling that Ev Dirksen was perhaps too close to LBJ, that he'd go down there at the end of the day. Famous stories, over a couple, more than a couple bourbons they'd cut deals and get bills passed and that Ford was seen as someone who'd maybe be a little bit less in Johnson's thrall.
- Michel: Right. And, well, I think that, and you see it even today I guess, that, geez, you can't be so lovey-dovey with the opposition so that we're not getting our say appropriately. There's no question about Ev Dirksen had a way with all the members and with the opposition. Geez, you only need listen to Jack Valenti when he was still living and he would tell the stories about how many times Everett and Lyndon got together on things and the trade-offs and that was the way things were done back in those days. There's just far less of that today, you just don't think of it in those terms. That was the old school of



politics. Like I said, Jerry made a marked difference there. They felt that Jerry wasn't going to be falling in with the opposition as would, they'd say, Dirksen did.

Smith: There are stories about how Ford and Hale Boggs would go down to the National Press Club and debate issues. They'd drive down together, decide on the way what they were going to debate, have their debate, go have drinks at lunch, and then go back to the Hill.

Michel: Right.

Smith: It's hard to imagine Congress operating like that.

Michel: Right, but that was how it was in those days. You did have the respect of the other side to the degree that, "Hey, we're in this thing together, but we've also got to be opponents." One of my problems with Newt during my leadership, I said, "Newt, they're not our enemies. They're our political adversaries and you've got to treat them with respect." And I said, point blank, "You maybe liked Martin and Rayburn switching back and forth so you'd better loosen up on the rhetoric."

Smith: What are the factors that made things different then? Some people have talked about more socializing across the aisle. More members had their families here; it was a village.

Michel: There was more time spent here. It wasn't running home every weekend. Of course, along that line, we always used to criticize that T & T Club, in Tuesday, out Thursday, and they were the Philadelphia and New York lawyers who made their money practicing law over the weekends and came down here as an avocation. We had them in both parties and we used to gripe at those guys an awful lot, of course, in fact, some of the old timers say, "Hey, we're back in the old T & T days.

Smith: We were talking about the different mood in those days, the socialization that went on across the aisle, the fact that families were here in town.

Michel: And there didn't seem to be the need to go home every weekend like there is now. Of course, when I first was elected, we had one paid trip back and forth

to Washington. So, man, you had to stay here. And I remember, up until the time when my wife would be counseling incoming members' wives on what do you do with the kids, and she said, "It's a tough one, but it's your decision." Of course, she'd been here ten years during my AA, she had measurement of Washington and the surrounding area. She was a school teacher before we were married and without a doubt, she said, "Our kids are going to be educated at home." So we both made the decision, there wasn't a dispute between us because we recognized it was better for them. Of course, it turned out better for the kids, too.

Smith: One of the rituals of those days I knew Ford took part in was the baseball game. Tell us about it.

Michel: Oh, gosh, before they had the old Griffith Stadium and we went out there, it was fun. I would like to play baseball in high school and college so I was very interested. And, of course, we had those games out at Griffith Stadium. Usually the preliminary game before the regular Senators game back in those days and Jerry, of course, was a good athlete and he was playing. Tom Curtis from Missouri was a good catcher. Charlie Goodell as a matter of fact, of course that was later on, but he was my catcher there at one time. We Republicans won eleven games in a row or something like that. I remember my boss played some, I think he stumbled over first base at one time, broke his arm or wrenched it. There were several accidents.

Smith: Do you remember some of the folks who played for the Democrats?

Michel: From Georgia they had Wheeler, "Fireball" Wheeler, I think they called him. Gee-whiz, it gets a little foggy, some of those names. They were good competitive games and we had a lot of fun doing it.

Smith: Let's move on - Johnson leaves office and Nixon is elected. And clearly Ford entertained hopes of becoming Speaker, particularly if the '72 landslide would bring in enough Republicans. Did he express frustration with the failure to obtain the majority? That's when he promised Betty he would run for one more term and then he would retire. Did he talk about that?

- Michel: Not really, but I was a strong Nixon supporter. Man, everything, every little speech or everything that he had given or whatnot, I made sure it was in the congressional record and I was a strong Nixon supporter all the time. So, of course, when you don't win the whole ball of wax, it's got to be somewhat discouraging. And it's too bad for Jerry because it would've been a different thing if he would've become Speaker.
- Smith: Did he really want to be Speaker?
- Michel: Yeah, just like in my case, it would be nice to be Speaker. I wasn't ever thinking in terms of going into the executive branch, being president or vice president. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I think it was the same thing with Jerry. He just wanted to be Speaker of the House, the top spot in the House and you're third ranking. Gosh, you can be mighty powerful.
- Smith: That's interesting because you use the word 'powerful.' I don't often think of him as someone who was accumulating power. What was it about the House? I mean obviously he loved the House and obviously there are lots of people who love the House, presumably including yourself.
- Michel: Yeah.
- Smith: What is it about the institution, for example, that makes it different from the Senate?
- Michel: Yeah, well, they always talk about the Senate as being a clubby affair and you do get the impression that, well at least most of the time, individual senators can get along with one another. And that's a nice place to be serving and animosity's not nearly as strong in the House. Well, in the first place, you're limited in the time you've got to speak, so you'd better capsule what you're going to speak in five minutes and make it good because you're not going to go on and on like senators would with no time limitation. It lent itself to more frequent exchanges when you really did have a debate. That's the other thing, today everybody gets up and gives a blurb in one minute when they're given the time. Nobody yields to anybody else when they're given a question. But in the old days, "Would the gentleman yield for a question?" "Yeah, sure."

Then you get a good mix of debate, but you don't get that in the House anymore today, unfortunately.

Smith: Do you think television on balance has been good or bad?

Michel: Well, I had a war with myself at the time, this thing of electronically covering the House of Representatives. How many show boaters are we going to have up there hogging the doggone screen instead of legislating? I was concerned about it, wondering whether this thing will really work or whether it becomes a show, you know, a theatrical type of thing. And, of course, as a member, I had to give some strong admonishment to a member one time when he came on a floor with a brown sack over his head trying to dramatize a particular point. Or this idea of bringing loaves of bread and stuff on the floor of the House, that to me, demeaned the chamber. I didn't like to see us get to that point. Jerry was always very scrupulously for decorum in the House, too.

Smith: What do you do when, and I'm not looking for names, but people who either perhaps had a drinking problem or were sort of past their prime. How did you handle those?

Michel: Well, one of the reasons that I guess I never wrote a book is because you can't write a book and have everything coming up roses. You'd have to cover the situations you'd prefer not to be talking about, and because I don't think a doggone book would sell just talking about the legislative process. I said, "I could write a real juicy one" and I'm sure there were a few occasions maybe when generally among the members we'd know something about members, you know, having a problem other than drinking and we'd talk about it, "Listen, how do we straighten this thing out?"

For me, the tough thing to deal with was the lapses of ethical behavior in my contemporaries because, first of all it demeaned the institution. We were always getting enough bad publicity as an institution. And to have this exposed or that exposed or that talked about, this was not good. Or for the individual members welfare back home, to get themselves reelected.

Sometimes you just had to talk to them like a Dutch uncle and say, "Look, I'm hearing things that I shouldn't be hearing. I don't want to be more

specific than that but doggone it, straighten up and fly right.” And so I’m sure, Jerry, we never talked about it specifically, but I’m sure if I had them, he had them.

Smith: I always found him unusual, because lots of politicians like gossip and he never did. I almost sensed that he was uncomfortable around the gossiping. I mean, political gossip was one thing, but personal gossip was something that he found offensive.

Michel: Yeah, a waste of time. Yeah, he was always business, all business. And in our group of Chowder & Marching folks, it wouldn’t be Jerry that would bring up things like that, other than when he was Leader to say, “Well, sure, if there’s something I ought to be knowing about here, let me know so we can get this thing corrected.”

Smith: Do you remember where you first heard about the Watergate break-in?

Michel: Oh, gosh, boy, it’s kind of hard to go back.

Smith: Well, I mean, what was your initial reaction?

Michel: I thought, “Oh, geez.” Of course, as I indicated earlier, I was a strong Nixon supporter, but I was pretty surprised that the taping was going on.

Smith: Did the language of the tapes surprise you?

Michel: Right, that really bothered me. Then, of course, another thing I learned about it was if a president’s in trouble, his circle of friends ought not to shrink, it ought to build. And, boy, if Ev Dirksen would’ve lived long enough, he would’ve been the only one who would’ve had the stature and one thing or another to go to Nixon and say, “Dick, fire their (you know what).”

Smith: I tell you a story, several members of the cabinet, led by Mel Laird over the winter of ’70-71, met and they were very upset with the way things were developing at that point. They were particularly upset about Haldeman and Erlichman. Rose Mary Woods shared this view and this group said none of them were going to go to Nixon and none of them thought they had the clout to make Nixon listen. And they thought and thought - who was the one

person who could make Nixon listen - and they decided it was Tom Dewey. They were going to get to Dewey when he was in Florida. He died before he could come back. So there were clearly within the cabinet, at least, some real concerns about the directions that the White House was going. As Watergate expanded, became a political burden, how was Ford handling this?

Michel: And, out of all things, that was the year I was elected chairman of the congressional campaign committee and that was my first job up the leadership ladder. And, boy, I tell you, my wife and I would hate to get up in the morning and say, "What shoe fell last night?" It was just a very anxious time because, holy smokes, is there anything good going to happen here? It's one darned problem after another. And then, of course, we end up losing 47 seats in the House.

Smith: Or is it 74? It's 74.

Michel: You're right. Boy.

Smith: I want to get to that, but before that, for example, were there rumors about Agnew before Agnew resigned?

Michel: Not with me. I did not hear. I was floored, although, I will say, I was floored by Nixon at his selection at the convention. I said, "Who is he?" It was kind of like this last time around with Sarah Palin and John McCain. And I guess I did read he was the governor of Maryland or something, but I was just completely floored. Of course, I think, too, when Dan Quayle was picked by George the First. I think your mind has other people conjured up and when it doesn't happen you're tremendously surprised.

Smith: When Agnew resigns, in very short order, Nixon turns to Ford. Now, what went on among your colleagues, because the classic story is Nixon wanted John Connally and John Connally wasn't going to fly, apparently, on the Hill. Is that safe to say?

Michel: Yeah, as much as some of us thought a lot of John at the time.

Smith: And supposedly it was the Democratic leadership, Carl Albert and, to a lesser degree, Mike Mansfield, who in effect impressed upon the White House that, “The one guy we can confirm is Jerry Ford.” Is that your recollection?

Michel: Right. Yep, that happened to be the safest and sure bet and of course I had no qualms about that whatsoever. But going back to Agnew, man, I was just stunned to think that could happen. Maybe at some lower state offices, you’d hear a lot of that stuff in Springfield and whatever, but not here at the national level and the vice president. I was just, boy, taken aback. I couldn’t believe it. And oddly enough, after that was over and I’d played golf with Agnew, with Mel Laird, and I think Bill Rogers, the secretary of state, and after Agnew passed away, I still kept people on my Christmas cards, you know, and one of the nicest notes I got after he’d passed away was from his wife because I’d continued to send a card and I forget now exactly how she told me but it definitely made the impression that people abandon you after awhile and they don’t want to have a thing to do with you. “Bob, you’ve been very kind to remember me and I just wanted you to know I appreciate it.” So that caused me to continue sending out over 700 Christmas cards. At one time, it was about 10,000, when I was Leader.

Smith: Yep.

Michel: But if there’s a widow or a widower, I keep them on my list because I just remembered that incident. You know, people will abandon you and who are your real friends - at least those who think enough to say that you’re deserving of my remembering.

Smith: Talking about real friends, apparently, Ford and Carl Albert must have been real friends.

Michel: Yeah. I don’t know so much about it. Of course, I took a couple trips with Carl Albert and those were experiences, too. I think, when it was a state dinner or something and he’d say, “I’m glad to be here in Yugoslavia” when we were in Czechoslovakia or something like that.

Smith: The mood among House Republicans must have been pretty celebratory when Ford’s name was announced.

Michel: When the word got out and spinning around that, "Hey, we've got to come up with a candidate and quickly," and "Boy, nobody better than looking at our own Leader, Jerry Ford. He's got the experience and can be confirmed." We were all excited.

Smith: Did you think at that point that he might be president? I mean, did you entertain the possibility?

Michel: I guess I didn't think that far ahead at that time, no. I just thought that, "Boy, you make it to vice president, eventually, some time he can run."

Smith: While he was vice president, did he maintain contacts?

Michel: Oh, yeah, particularly with our C & M group.

Smith: Well, let me ask you, this whole story of Watergate. Did you express or your colleagues express your concern to the vice president to communicate down to the White House?

Michel: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the fellows could really unload. We knew Jerry so well that we could tell him anything. And wanted him to know as much as we knew that would help him do his job better or to be alert of some pitfalls.

Smith: He was in an awkward position, wasn't he?

Michel: Yes, he was, in a sense, but he handled it with aplomb.

Smith: Did he defend the president in these conversations?

Michel: I guess, he never undercut the president, that's for sure. Sometimes I think he'd say maybe he'd do it differently, that kind of thing, because he'd never undercut him. But he was less than enthusiastic on some, I can't remember specifically, there were those times. But again, that was in-house and we could all talk with confidence to one another.

Smith: As the impeachment proceedings began, did the tone of those conversations change at all? I mean, there must have been a perception that we're talking now with someone who may very well wind up as president.



- Michel: Yeah, when you got closer, boy, and I was sticking with Nixon and what finally, oh the fellow from California who was named the Circuit Court of Appeals judge. He was in the House.
- Smith: Republican?
- Michel: Yeah.
- Smith: Wiggins?
- Michel: Wiggins, Chuck Wiggins. And Chuck and I, of course, I had to keep bugging Chuck all the time. Railsback was from Illinois, but I knew Railsback, he was going to vote for impeachment, or he was on the other side, so I confided in Wiggins. And then Chuck said, "You know, Bob, our battle is over. I think we've lost it. We've lost the battle." That was very traumatic, very traumatic times, when I'd think of impeachment.
- Smith: Did you see Nixon at all in his final days?
- Michel: No, except that I was there the night when he resigned. I was in the Cabinet room.
- Smith: You were?
- Michel: Yeah.
- Smith: Tell us about that.
- Michel: Yeah, I wrote about that. I should probably dig it out of the Dirksen files and send you a copy of what I wrote. I had the presence of mind to take an envelope out of my pocket, because there was no press there. Gene Berch(?) was there and, of course, Sam Devine, Cederberg, Stennis, Eastland, Tiger Teague.
- Smith: The hard core.
- Michel: The hard core, you aren't kidding, around the Cabinet room. And the president comes in and Nixon, you know he's always kind of stiff like that and he comes up to the table and he started out as, I guess you historians you know this, about his mother and his father and back in California and I called

my description of that the next day a room full of tears. It was touching. And of course he says, "Fellows," because I don't think there were any women there, "Fellows, I just hope you won't feel I let you down." And, you know, we had been let down. And then, son of a gun, he got up after that, straightened his shoulders and went out and made his speech. And, of course, then that lead to the next day when Corrine and I were so privileged to be there in the East Room.

Smith: Tell us about that.

Michel: Oh, gosh, that was like I think my spine tingled on hearing a fabulous aria song or something for me, "Boy, here's Jerry Ford who we've known from those early days on. And, my gosh, he's being sworn in as President of the United States." It was a really moving thing for me. Boy, and so happy, you know. And, of course, Jerry's comments about, "Our long nightmare of Watergate is over," and here I was experiencing all of this and thinking, "What I've experienced in my time, this is history in the making."

Smith: Did the mood change overnight? I mean, I know in his first few days he had this Congressional Black Caucus down at the White House and George Meany and other groups that had not been around the White House for awhile. It's almost as if he understood the power of symbolism.

Michel: Oh yes.

Smith: Of opening the place. And then, of course, came the pardon. Now, had there been discussions, informal or private, advice sought or whatever about the Nixon pardon before it happened?

Michel: Ever since that happened, I said, "Had it not been for the pardon, the President would've beaten Carter, and we would've won the election." But he had to do it.

Smith: How bad was it? How bad was the reaction?

Michel: Of course, having been an original Nixon supporter as strong as I was, my feelings were different than a lot of others who thought that was just terrible.

- Smith: Did you tell him that you approved of the pardon?
- Michel: I don't think I ever did.
- Smith: Because one story is that there were in fact members of Congress who rushed out in public and denounced it while privately telling the White House, you did the necessary thing.
- Michel: Well, I didn't think it was necessary in my own case to cover my back side or whatever because everybody knew I was a strong, strong Nixon supporter and that you go through so much and that's enough, impeachment and resigning and the humiliation of it all.
- Smith: Now, Mel Laird, it'll come as no surprise, had a scheme or he thought he had a scheme that would've—
- Michel: He's a schemer of all schemes.
- Smith: Mel's convinced himself he told Jerry, "Don't do this until I get back." He was going to get a bipartisan delegation from both parties of the House and go down to the White House and petition the president for a pardon. Now that sounds fine in the abstract, but if you put yourself in the political mood of that period, it seems to me that any trial balloon would've been shot down before it got to tree level. I mean, how could Ford, in that climate, have "prepared" the country for this unpopular act? Was there an alternative? In effect, he threw himself on the sword.
- Michel: Right.
- Smith: And what was the alternative?
- Michel: I don't know.
- Smith: I mean, he was supposedly being told by Jaworski that it could take two years to come to trial which would consume his presidency.
- Michel: Oh, right. And I don't know, I just think as close as we all were and particularly Jerry to Nixon, "Well, I've got the power to cut it short and try to

go on from here,” because all that trauma over that. I’m sure he thought it through, I never asked him specifically.

Smith: You said you were head of the Republican House Campaign Committee. You must have heard a lot about the pardon.

Michel: Oh, sure. Jeepers.

Smith: How bad was it?

Michel: It was terrible. I just knew we were going down to terrible defeat and there was nothing I could do about it. And then, of course, during the campaign to be faced with the pardon, you just tried to cover it the best you could, that the president just looked at things and said to have this thing drag on endlessly and how’s he going to bring the country back together to accomplish anything. Then subsequently after time passed, “Son of a gun, if we had been given another two or three weeks, we would’ve pulled that baby out.”

Smith: You know, the great irony, forget Mel Laird’s scheme for a moment. Of course, you know Nixon became very ill and almost died and there was no way of knowing that, but in some ways, if Ford had waited to pardon Nixon until he was sitting on his deathbed, maybe there would’ve been a different reaction.

Michel: That could’ve been different. Yeah.

Smith: Were you down at the White House frequently during the Ford presidency? Was there much contact between you?

Michel: Let’s see, what was I doing at that time? Well I hadn’t gotten up to the point, but I’m trying to think, I’ve got to go back through George the First and Reagan, you know.

Smith: Well, for example, he came up and testified before the House, only President in American history who did that, about the pardon. That must have been extraordinary.

Michel: Oh, yeah, we were all obviously listening and “How did you justify it yourself?” I guess. That whole episode was such a traumatic episode.

Smith: And in the middle of all this is Mrs. Ford's cancer surgery. Now, had you gotten to know her?

Michel: Oh, sure. Betty and Corinne were real good friends.

Smith: Tell me about it, because we know now that it was rough on her. He was away a lot. The burdens of child-rearing fell on her. That's probably not terribly unusual for a lot of political wives at that time. Did you sense that she had problems?

Michel: Not really, at our social gatherings, gosh, she was so gracious. And then when we had our C & M meetings, we all had a toddy or two and then you just feel, oh shoot, if there was any giddiness. But there was nothing that gave me any indication that she was anything other than the way my wife was conducting herself.

Smith: Was it tough on political wives?

Michel: Oh, I think it is. I'm reminded now, of course, of my own successor, of course, now he's the secretary of transportation, but one of their decisions for his not running. I took them to dinner a lot and she'd say, "Bob, you know, our life is nothing like it was with you and Corrine," because she knew it and they went along with us and could experience it personally. She said, "It's just not like that anymore and I have no base from which to have friendships and all my friends are back home." So that's when she decided, "To heck with it" and she was going home. Of course, Ray, since he had been characterized as a more moderate member, he probably wasn't going to go anyplace in leadership as much as I kept saying, "Doggone it, Ray, with your capacity and capabilities, you can get up..." Well, he wasn't sold on that.

But going back to the original question, it's tough on wives. It's a combination of things. The fact that, then of course, now, you can go home every weekend, that's still a problem. You want to be a participant in what's going on here, but if the sociability isn't there, that's hard to put that together. Earlier on, when you couldn't get the time to go home and you tried to counsel a member on whether or not he brought his family down here or there, I said, "You know, as my wife would tell your wife, that's one you two

have to decide for yourselves.” But I saw, no question in my time, that that caused break-ups in families. No question about it in my mind. You’ve got to be a very strong-willed, number one woman to put up with all that crap, pardon the French. But I always said, “Man, I owe so much to Corinne for how she handled our case,” and, boy, we raised four kids and it worked out just beautifully. When you’ve been married 55 years to the same gal, then nobody’s going to take her place.

Smith: Yep.

Michel: Jerry and Betty were such a wonderful couple always. Geez. It was just so wonderful to know them and consider them my friends.

Smith: So, as far as you could see, she enjoyed being first lady?

Michel: Yeah, she did.

Smith: The entertaining?

Michel: Right, she just handled it perfectly.

Smith: He, of course, adapted after ’74. How did things change with all the Watergate Babies, so called, who came in and started rewriting all the rules?

Michel: Yeah, of course, then, that’s when things really started changing dramatically here. There’s no question about that. Just the climate, everything. Thinking back to Watergate kind of reminds me of the day here with all the things that are going on. “Well, that was all Bush”, “That was all Bush”, “Bush”, “Bush”, “Bush”, “Bush”, “Bush”, “Bush”. Then to think, “Geez, when are you going to get out on your own and take responsibility? But then I guess we talk about the doggone cycles in politics, I guess that’s what we’re talking about.

Smith: Isn’t it ironic that Gerald Ford would spend his life on the Hill, but as president finds himself fending off Congress with the War Powers Act or foreign policy and spending issues. Now, the veto strategy, you ended up sustaining most of those vetoes. That couldn’t be easy.

Michel: Right.

Smith: How was strategy coordinated with the White House?

Michel: I'm not altogether sure how all that worked with Jerry during his administration because I didn't play the role like I did with Reagan and Bush, where there was a marked contrast with George W. and Denny Hastert, so much so that I asked, "Denny, what kind of relationship do you have?" "Oh, fine." But I can tell it was nothing like my relationship with Reagan because I would call down there, of course we were different, we were a minority, and Denny had the majority, George W. probably would've said, "Well, to hell with it. I don't have to go through that routine." But the times that Reagan was willing to have me bring as many as four groups in a day, two in the morning, two in the afternoon, just ten or so for the old treatment, the ones that are for you are on the right, the ones that are against you are on the list and the swing votes are here in the middle, and, boy, Reagan could play that like a violin. I just had such a good relationship with him that anything I wanted him to do, he would do.

Smith: And do well.

Michel: Right, right. Well, with just the extreme of my request and the people that I was dealing with, geez, Jim Baker, Mike Deaver, Duberstein, man, I just felt like I had a great relationship.

Smith: Yeah.

Ford had a temper he spent a lifetime controlling it. Did you ever see that?

Michel: Oh, not much. I guess I'd never bring that up on my own. "Oh geez, Jerry had one hell of a temper." Not one to be aware of. It never really affected me that much that way.

Smith: Did you see it?

Michel: But I could tell sometimes he'd raise his voice and get pretty perturbed, but not out of the ordinary. For God's sakes, he had every reason to be ticked off. I can't remember the specific details.

Smith: One of the things that really angered him policy-wise was after Saigon fell and Congress decided to pull the plug on funding for resettling refugees. And that made him angry. And he went to the country and eventually got it turned around. In your memories surrounding that period, was it just that overwhelming desire to put it behind us? Did that explain it?

Michel: I think so, it probably always ties in. He was a great one for looking forward. He'd pick up from the experience of the past mistake of one thing or another and try to adjust and go forward.

Smith: The Reagan-Ford contest in '76, how did that divide the House Republicans?

Michel: I don't know that it did, I'm trying to think.

Smith: Because, by that time, you had a Southern party, you had Southern congressmen who presumably were more conservative.

Michel: Yeah, right. Of course, Bob Griffin and I were doing the floor deal that time and the one thing I have in the Dirksen Library, is one of my Whip counts at the convention with that procedural motion that we won. Then we knew we had this whole thing.

Smith: Was there doubt going into that?

Michel: No, I mean, you didn't know for sure. But that wasn't that big of a doggone win, either, as I recall.

Smith: Stu Spencer said he was amazed and very happy that they made the test vote on a procedural question because, he said, "If I'd been running the Reagan campaign, I would've found something emotional like foreign policy." Something you could really rev up. And, of course, what the White House did was basically give them the foreign policy plank so they wouldn't have that.

Michel: That was an interesting comparison for me because my youngest son, Robin, was dating Charlie Wick's oldest daughter and he was sitting in the Reagan box while I'm down there hustling for Ford. Of course, the Reagans came to



Robin's wedding and that was resolved. You get over it and replay it and, my gosh, how things all shake out.

Smith: How brutal was that convention?

Michel: Well, I don't know. I look back and there were some strong feelings with some people, but I guess I wouldn't characterize it as real intense.

Smith: It really came down to Mississippi, remember, Clarke Reed and Mississippi. What is it about Clarke Reed who has a reputation for, you can buy him, but he won't stay bought.

Michel: Yeah, well, there were some characters over a period of our history who were very unique. And every once in awhile, I have to make mention of the fact that Haley Barbour is different than Clarke Reed, but still has those Mississippi roots, but he's a different personality.

Smith: Were you consulted at all, asked for your opinion about the vice presidency that went to Bob Dole with other Republican House members?

Michel: I don't know. I'm getting it mixed up now because, you know, Jack Kemp is going to have a big dinner with him for Occidental College. I'm just apprehensive how Jack will look because he sounded terrible on the phone when I heard him.

Smith: Did you stay in touch with Ford in later years after he left the White House?

Michel: Oh yeah, of course, I loved him, we just got the invitation for another Ford reunion. I'm looking forward to it, because boy those are all the old hard core guys who you just enjoyed being with so much.

Smith: In some ways, time was good to him. He lived long enough to know that people had come around to his position on the pardon. And I think people were taking a fresh look—

Michel: Yeah, he has to leave this world feeling that he'd really made a significant contribution to the betterment of things on all scores, adding up. He would have to have said, "Lord, thank you for looking over me the way you have."

Smith: And, of course, Mrs. Ford, she went on to make history in her own right. It's extraordinary the impact that she's had.

Michel: Yes.

Smith: How do you think he should be remembered?

Michel: Well, he was a president who filled a gap, boy, at just a very, very critical time in our history. It's like providence, playing a role and playing Jerry Ford the way the Lord wanted it to be played. He got to be Leader in the House, which he wanted to be, except that he didn't make the Speaker. But of all things, events unfolded to the degree that he bypassed the Speakership and became vice president and filled the role admirably and went on to become president. And just for that one quirk of fate there, he would've been president. He would've made it. But all the good that he did and the good will that he has engendered over the years, the Lord would have to say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Smith: That couldn't be better.

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